The Art of Figure Drawing

Charles Harvey Weigall

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W. G. MASON

THE ART

OF

FIGURE DRAWING:

CONTAINING

PRACTICAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR A COURSE OF STUDY
IN THIS BRANCH OF ART.

BY

CHARLES H. WEIGALL,

OF THE QUEEN'S COLLEGE, LONDON, AND MEMBER OF THE NEW WATER COLOUR SOCIETY.

With Seventeen Illustrations,

DRAWN ON WOOD BY THE AUTHOR, AND ENGRAVED BY WALTER G. MASON

Ars probat artificem.

IOTHECA·BODLEIANA

LONDON:
WINSOR AND NEWTON, 38, RATHBONE PLACE,
Artists' Colour Makers, by Special Appointment, to Her Majesty, and to
H.R.H. Prince Albert.

1852.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.

PREFACE.

THERE have been many works published on Landscape Painting containing the results of the experience of the best masters in this delightful branch of Art, and many also on Figure Drawing, but the latter for the most part on too extensive a scale, and in too expensive a form, to be generally available. A requirement, which has long been felt, is now being supplied; and there is already published, at a moderate price, a series of valuable Elementary Works on Landscape Painting and Perspective, by Mr. Penley and the Messrs. Rowbotham, which may be perused with great advantage by the Artist as well as the Amateur.

The Author indulges the hope, that the following brief work on Figure Drawing may be equally useful; and that, although it is not to be expected that all which may be required to make a figure draughtsman will be found in its pages, sufficient information may be given to facilitate self-instruction ; and that, at least, there is nothing that will place any impediment in the way of the pupil who may have the benefit of a master's attention.

In the Rules and Illustrations, all minuteness and complexity have been as much as possible avoided; as the Author has always found, in his experience, the most valuable information was that contained in the simplest form.

13, MICHAEL'S PLACE, BROMPTON,
MARCH, 1852.

THE ART

OF

FIGURE DRAWING.

LINES.

The power of making a line is of paramount importance. In all pencil or chalk drawing, the shading and finishing are but a repetition of lines, and if one line cannot be made with an equal pressure of the pencil throughout, the evenness of tint necessary to produce the appearance of shadow cannot be arrived at: one line in a mass of shading, uneven in its form or colour, interrupts the continuity necessary to produce the proper effect; and although we find that a certain amount of mechanical dexterity in handling the pencil is not difficult to be attained, its necessity is not sufficiently insisted upon in the first instance. Neither must it be forgotten, that when we leave the pencil for the use of the brush, we only change one instrument for another; the power acquired in the first instance will be our aid throughout our future practice.

The first step in drawing should therefore be to make a line. Let us then proceed to consider the best method of its production. A line is either straight or curved. The mode of drawing curved lines will be explained hereafter. In the case of a straight line, its place and length being determined, the student should make a mark, the point from whence it is to proceed, and another where it is to terminate, and, placing the hand so that it can command the line from point to point, he should pass the pencil a few times between them, until he feels that he can make the line with certainty and precision. When such a line can be made, with facility, something has been attained; a certain amount of connexion between the mind and the hand has been established, and the latter is prepared to become the instrument of the former.

In drawing the figure, a firmer and more careful line is required than in drawing landscape; it requires also more careful observation and comparison; and, should the taste of the pupil hereafter incline to Landscape Drawing, the command of hand acquired in this previous practice will be found of great assistance.

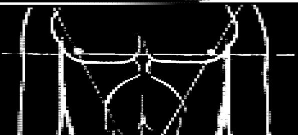
PROPORTION.

When we consider the variation to which the human form is subject in different parts of the globe, it seems difficult, at first, to find the standard in which beauty consists.

The consent of ages has been given to that established by the Greeks, and found in those works of that great people which remain to us.

In them we find all that can realize the idea of beauty to our minds, the symmetry of the whole, and the fitness and the adaptation of the parts being that from which nothing can be taken away, and to which nothing can be added; this standard seems indeed to be a test of truth in all matters of Art relating to the beau-ideal of human form. We have, however, not always to represent the perfection of form; and it is quite evident that no rule can be given that will answer to the countless varieties, national or individual, that come before our daily experience; but as all these are departures from the acknowledged standard, a knowledge of that first obtained would enable us the more readily to detect them, and see wherein the difference lies. The short and squat figure of the Laplander, or the tall and muscular figure of the Caffre or Patagonian, could, by a reference to rule, be satisfactorily given on paper, by the number of heads or spaces the figure was divided into, according to the scale to be found in this work.

The physiognomical distinction between nations is also easily observable, so that we could tell at a glance the Arab from the Chinese, or the Negro from the European, and refer these differences to the given standard. The small eyes obliquely set in the head, the raised eyebrows, and the broad flat nose, would enable us to mark the Chinese; and the retiring forehead, the skull rising behind the projecting jaws, flat nose, large nostrils, and



Across the calf is two noses and a half, or $\frac{5}{8}$ of a head.

Across the small of the ankle is one nose, or $\frac{1}{4}$ of a head.

The hand is $\frac{3}{4}$ of a head in length, and the length of the middle finger is equal to half the hand.

The Ancients allow one-sixth of the whole length of the figure for the length of the foot, rather less than more. This scale of proportion would answer for a fine model six feet in height; therefore all more than 8 heads would increase the appearance of tallness, and all below that proportion would tend to give the appearance of shortness.

PLATES II. and III.

BACK VIEW OF THE FIGURE—WIDTH.

	Heads.
Across the widest part of the head above the ears	¾
Across the neck	½
Across the setting on of the shoulders . .	1½
Across the shoulders	2
Across the waist	1¼
Across the hips	1½
Across the middle of the thigh . . .	¾
Across the top of the knee	½
Across the bottom of the knee . . .	½
Across the small of the ankle	one nose, or ¼

PLATE II.

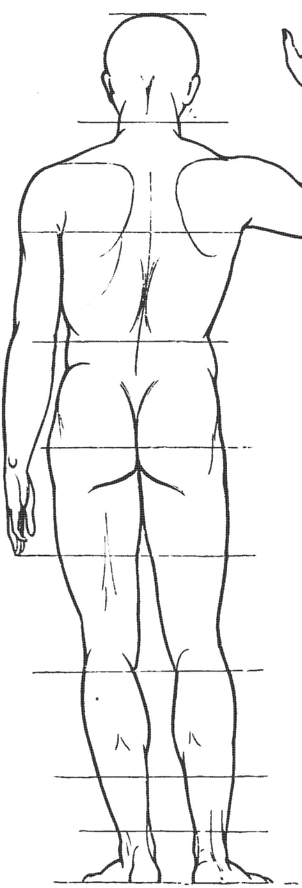


PLATE III.

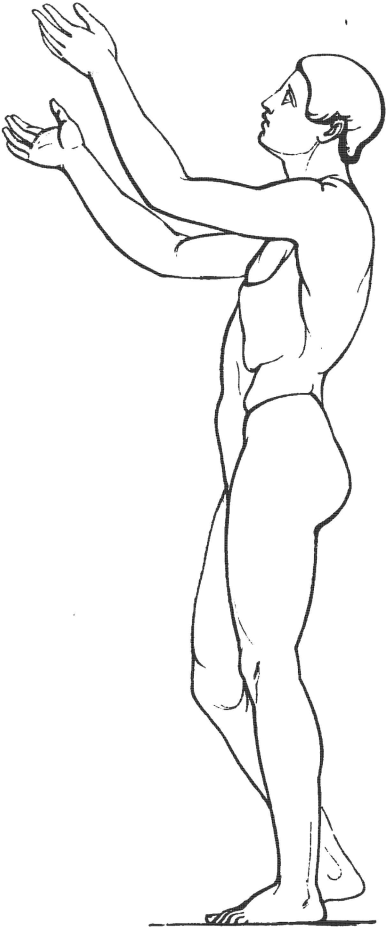


PLATE IV.

THE FEMALE FIGURE.

The height of the female figure may be reduced into the same number of divisions as those of the male figure. The widths of the different parts will be found to vary considerably.

The head measures ¾ of a head in the widest part.

The width of the neck is half a head.

The width across the shoulders is one head and a half.

The width of the waist one head and ⅛th.

The width across the hips is two heads.

The width across the middle of the thigh is three-quarters of a head.

The width across the top of the knee is two noses and a quarter.

The width of the bottom of the knee is half a face.

The width across the calf is two noses and a quarter.

The width across the small part of the ankle is one nose.

The thickness of the foot, measured across the instep, is one-third of its length.

PLATE IV.

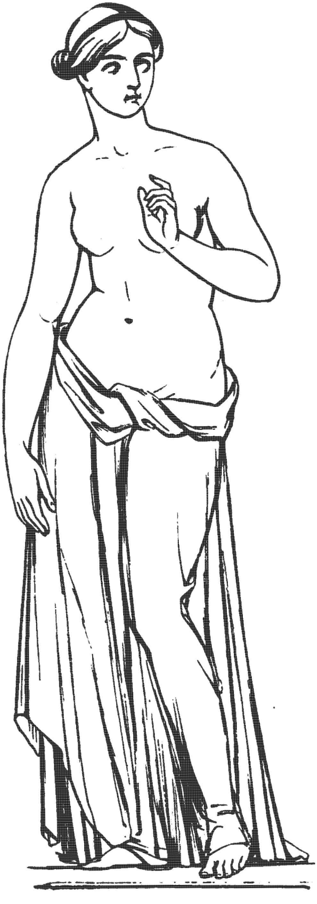


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PLATE V.

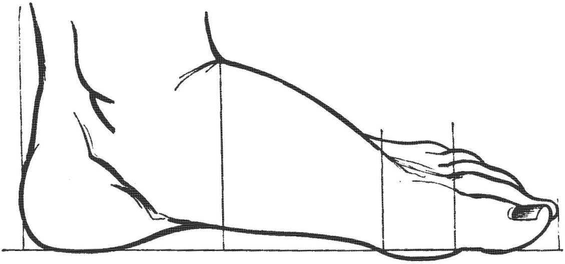
THE FOOT.

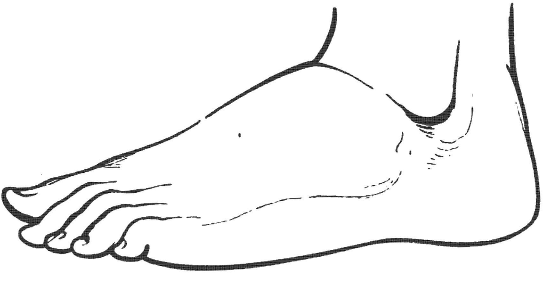
The length from the heel to the ball of the great toe, is two-thirds of the length of the foot.

The length of the great toe, not including the ball, is one-fifth of the length of the foot.

The width of the foot, at its widest part, is equal to two-fifths of its length.

PLATE V.





PLATES VI. and VII.

THE HAND.

The length from the wrist to the tip of the middle finger is ¾ of a head.

From the wrist to the division of the fingers is one half of the hand.

The thumb is one quarter of the head, or equal to 1 nose in length.

It will be well to observe, for the direction of the pupil, that the natural position of the upper arm, is at an angle outwards, and that of the lower arm inwards; so that, in a figure at perfect ease, the hands would approach each other in front.

The same observation applies to the lower limbs, which incline inwards from their junction with the body.

The fingers also have an inclination inwards towards the middle of the hand: the second finger is straight. In closing the hand, the thumb, the first, third, and fourth fingers converge towards the second finger.

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The muscular action of the foot is so much destroyed by the habit of wearing shoes, that it has lost its natural action; but in nations accustomed to leave the foot as free as the hand, it has the power of grasping an object with firmness. It has the same construction as the
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PLATE VI.

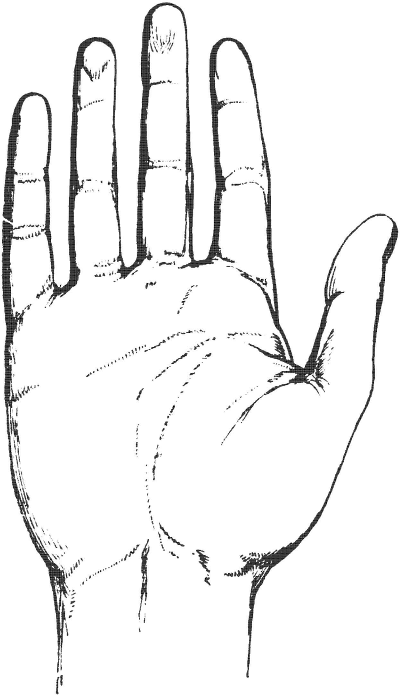


PLATE VII.

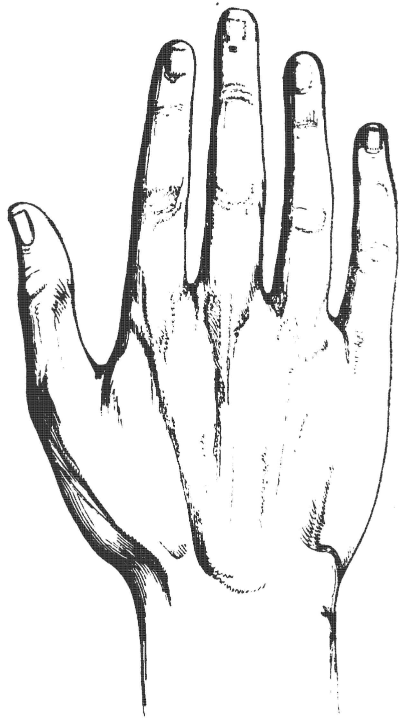
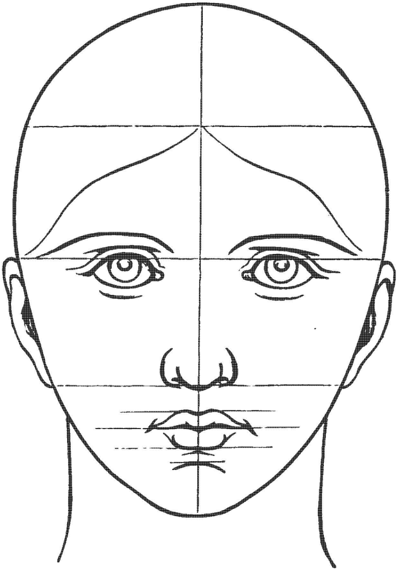


PLATE VIII.



Divide the upper portion into 3 parts, and this
will give the opening of the mouth . . 1st.
The depth of the upper lip . . . . 2nd.
The space between the upper lip and the nose 3rd.

The width of a lip from the point of the under lip will give the commencement of the chin.

The ear is equal to the length of the nose, and parallel to it. Just above the ear is the widest part of the head, equal to 1 face, or $\frac{3}{4}$ of a head.

The eye is about $\frac{1}{5}$th of this measure.

The space between the eyes is equal to the width of an eye; therefore, by dividing the line into 5 parts, we shall determine the size and situation of the eyes, and the space between them.

If lines parallel to the larger diameter were drawn from the corner of the eye on each side of the nose, they would give the width of the nostrils; so that the nostrils are the width of an eye.

The mouth is a trifle wider than an eye.

* * *

PLATE IX.

The full eye is divided into 3 equal parts, and the middle one is occupied by the pupil; of the profile eye the pupil occupies one third part in breadth, as seen in the given example.

The ear. Its situation has been described in the plates of the face. It is half its own length, in the widest part; if it be divided into 3 equal parts, the middle division will be the size of its orifice.

PLATE IX.

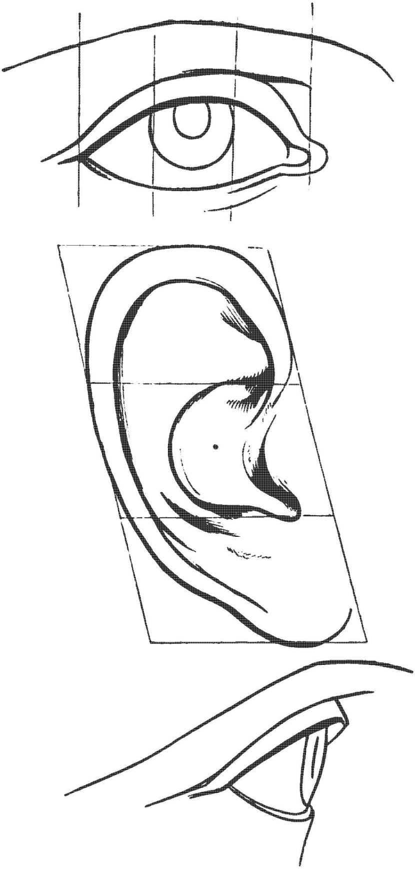


PLATE X.

The division of the front nose into 3 equal parts, gives the width of the middle nose, and that of each wing.

The front mouth, divided into 4 equal parts, shows the centre of the lips, and the points of the greatest fulness both of the upper and under lip.

PLATE X.

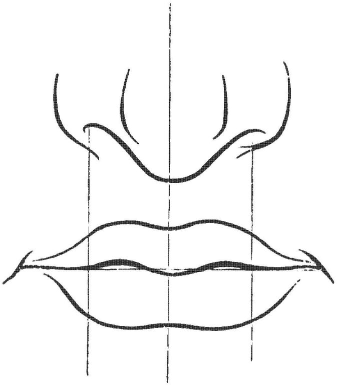


PLATE XI.

FOR THE PROFILE HEAD.

First draw a vertical line, equal in length to the height of the intended head; and then draw two straight lines at right angles to it, at its extremities; these two horizontal lines will touch the top of the head and the lowest point of the chin respectively. Divide the vertical line into 4 equal portions:

The *first* of these parts marks the vertical distance between the top of the head, and the front roots of the hair;

The *second*, that from the hair to root of the nose, (between the eyes);

The *third*, the length from thence to the bottom of the nose;

The *fourth*, that from the bottom of the nose to the bottom of the chin.

Bisect this *fourth* portion; and the point of bisection determines the lower point of the under lip.

Again; divide this last part (*i.e.* from the nose to the front of the under lip), into 3 portions;

The lowest portion determines the thickness of the under lip.

The next above determines the thickness of the upper lip.

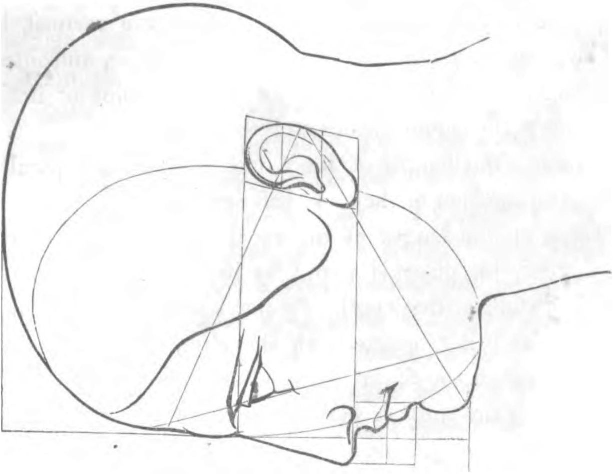
The uppermost, which is rather longer than the middle one, determines the distance between the nose and the upper lip.

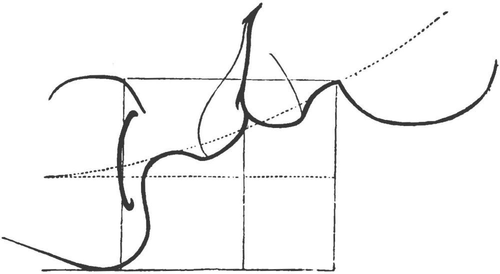
These points being determined on the vertical line, next draw between the horizontal lines, but touching only the lower one, an oval, the larger diameter of which, being vertical, is to be equal to the length of the vertical line from its top to the point marking the opening of the mouth or the top of the upper lip; and its lesser diameter equal to ¾ of the larger; and let it be placed, so that the extremity of its lesser diameter may touch the vertical line a little above the point marked for the roots of the nose. If this oval be carefully drawn, it will, in its course, pass somewhat behind the front opening of the mouth and the middle of the upper lip, and through the commencement of the chin under the lip; it will determine the angle of the under jaw (not its course); and it will pass through the centre of the ear.

Again: from the point on the vertical opposite the upper lip, draw a straight line perpendicular to the vertical, and meeting the oval; the bisection of this straight line will give the commencement of the upper lip.

Again: the projection of the nose before the vertical is nearly equal to the distance from the bottom of the nose (where it intersects the vertical), to the opening of the mouth.

PLATE XI.





Again: the vertical dividing the nose equally, the width of the wing of the nose is equal to its projection in front of the nostril.

Again: if a straight line, parallel to the vertical, be drawn, somewhat behind the wing of the nose, and intersecting the oval below the under lip, the point of intersection is the commencement of the chin.

Again: the length of the mouth is equal and parallel to the projection of the nose before the face.

Again: the length of the ear is equal to that of the nose, and its place is found by its centre being in the oval (distant at the length of 2 noses from the facial line), and by its being parallel with the nose, and at the same distance from the top of the head as the nose is.

Again: the highest part of the head lies immediately over the top of the ear.

Again: a line drawn from the middle of the forehead to the middle of the chin will give the inclination of the eye, the position of which is further determined by the top of the eyelid being opposite the root of the nose.

Again: if upon the straight line, drawn from the middle of the back of the ear to the middle of the forehead, an equilateral triangle be drawn, its vertex determines the point of the chin.

EXPRESSION.

Before we quit this part of our subject, it may be well to introduce some few remarks on the changes to which the human countenance is subject, when under the influence of the passions or emotions which belong to our nature. I do not mean to limit expression to its physiognomical characteristic. Passion affects every member of the body, and each part of it requires the closest observation of the artist in its successful representation. How much does the clenched hand and the muscular rigidity of the whole figure assist the expression of the face, in giving the character of deadly revenge or of powerfully-suppressed emotion! How do the softly-flowing lines and easy pose of the figure aid the gentle smile and placid look, in the expression of benevolence or sympathy! But we are now to treat of the face only; and as we are accustomed to regard that as the index of the mind, and as it is that part of the figure less constrained by habit and education, and, moreover, as it is there the organs are placed which are in immediate communication with the senses that feed the mind whence these passions have birth, it seems natural that we should find in the modifications of its outward form traces of the workings taking place within.

In persons who are denied the gift of speech, and in savage people whose language is barren, or, lower still in the scale of creation, in brute animals, which have no language beyond the modification of a sound, the expression of passion is observable in every part of their frame; but in civilized nations, having a copious language through which they are taught to express their wants and wishes, words supply the place of action, and gesticulation is controlled and kept dormant, until, on a sudden impulse being given, the restraint of habit and education is thrown aside, and Nature proclaims herself.

Sorrow. All the muscles of the face are relaxed, the head inclines forward, the eyebrows raised towards the middle of the forehead, the eyelids droop, the pupil of the eye is raised, the corners of the mouth are lowered, and, from the laxity of the muscles, the proportion of the face between the eye and mouth is lengthened. The same characteristics may be observed in pity, dejection, and melancholy.

Joy. This passion or emotion is principally expressed by the vivid eye, the mouth slightly open and its corners elevated. Its modifications may be considered as content, cheerfulness.

Pain. The eyebrows are contracted, the forehead wrinkled, the mouth slightly opened, and its corners depressed. These characteristics belong also to anguish and despair.

Anger. The head is raised, the eye glares, the eyebrows are contracted, the lips compressed, the veins of the head swollen, and the muscles of the face rigid.

Revenge, hatred, rage, and fury, may be classed with this passion.

Fear. The eyes are opened widely, and directed towards the object that excites the emotion; the white being visible above the iris. The eyebrows are raised, the forehead wrinkled, the mouth open, and the hair stands on end. Astonishment, horror, and terror, have also this expression.

Contempt. The head is raised, and slightly turned from the exciting cause. The eye is half-closed, the pupil lowered, and directed towards the object, the lips raised at the corners, more particularly on one side, and the nose wrinkled.

Its relatives are derision, scorn.

Laughter. The corners of the mouth are extended and raised, the upper portion of the cheeks raised, so as almost to close the eyes, which become sparkling, the corners of the eyelids being turned up and wrinkled; the nose also is wrinkled.

All the features aid in expression, but some more than others. If the rest of the face were covered, the eye with its brow would go far in expressing all the softer emotions of our nature; it speaks to us in intelligible language the sentiments of love, sympathy, pity or joy; while, in the more fierce and stormy passions by which we are agitated, the mouth and nose are called into action, and contribute their full share in giving to these passions expression.

METHOD OF OUTLINE.

It being supposed that the pupil has now made himself acquainted with the proportions which the different parts of the figure bear to each other, and that he is about to commence a drawing from a copy, he must first consider the quantity of the surface or paper he intends it to occupy, and making a mark for the top, and another for the bottom of the work, he must endeavour to obtain the general character of the subject, and without paying too much attention to details; sketching as much as possible in straight lines and angles, and leaving out some small parts rather than putting too many in, or making them too prominent.

In Plate XII., Fig. 1, these principles of the first sketch are shown. The curved lines are produced upon straight ones, the points and degree of curvature being thus more easily determined. The eye is very likely to be deceived by the roundness or fulness of the muscles, and the outline frequently drawn as if it were swollen, as in Plate XIII., Fig. 2. In making the curve, observe at what part there is the greatest deviation from the straight line; make a dot at such place, and draw your curve through it thus (Plate XII., Figs. 1 and 2.):

PLATE XII.

FIG. 1.

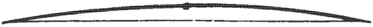


FIG. 2.

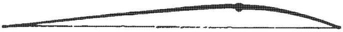
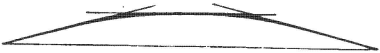


FIG. 3.



In other cases it will be best to draw them first in rectilineal angles, as in Fig. 3, and to make the curves by taking off the points; by the adoption of these methods, a certainty of hand is acquired, and freedom and vigour given to the drawing. The student should not neglect to pay attention to anatomy; it is the foundation of knowledge in this branch of art; it assists to explain, and enables us to judge of proportion and disproportion: for

PLATE XIII.

FIG. 1.

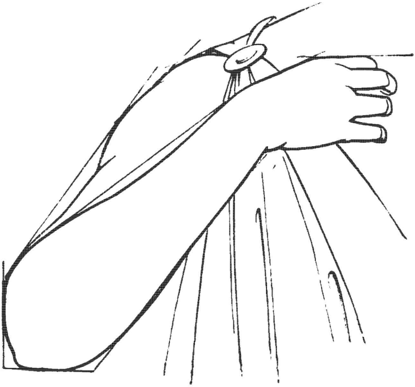
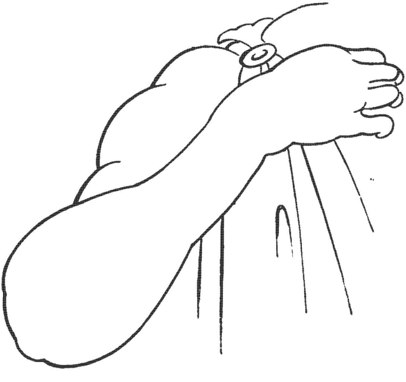


FIG. 2.



this purpose he should procure a plaster anatomical figure, which can be had at a reasonable rate from any of the plaster-figure moulders. From this figure the names and situation of the muscles, with their uses, origin and insertion, may be learnt, with the aid of any work of reference on the subject.*

We have spoken, in the preceding pages, of the importance of acquiring a facility in making a straight line between two given points; and we will now suppose the pupil to be acquainted with the proportion which the different parts of the figure bear to each other, and that he has had some practice in copying. He should now proceed to draw "from the round," as it is termed, that is to say, from plaster casts.

The drawing should be made in all cases conveniently large, and charcoal may be used instead of the pencil for sketching the work in, as in making large lines it obeys the hand more readily than the pencil does. The marking should be as lightly made as possible, as it may then be easily removed or dusted off with the handkerchief. The work should then be corrected with the chalk; and the shadows should be put in, with a repetition of lines crossing and recrossing each other, until these lines are lost in an even tone of gradation from the dark to the lights of the figure.

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* The pupil is referred to a most useful little work by Mr. Warren.

The next step will be the copying, in colour, from pictures of established reputation, and care must be taken that, in so doing, time be not lost in making a servile copy of every part of the picture, the attention being given to the arrangement of colour, to the quantities of dark and light, and to the principles upon which the picture is composed—in fact, to the making a careful analysis, to the best of the pupil's ability, of the work before him.

PLATE XIV.

DRAWING FROM THE LIVING FIGURE.

In drawing from nature, the model being first placed in the position in which it is intended to be represented, proceed according to the principles above described: first, mark on your paper the proportion and place it is to occupy thereon; having found the centre, or principal division, make a small mark, and then make other divisions to give the situation and proportion of the different parts. Hold the pencil at arm's length before the eye, and observe what parts of the figure fall upon the line perpendicularly, horizontally, or obliquely. A little nervousness will, no doubt, at first be experienced, but this will soon wear off. The greatest difficulty will be found in the drapery, as this is constantly changing, even with the breathing of the figure; first, then, sketch those lines of it which explain or give the action; then take any portion that comes well, and do as much as your time will allow. The principal folds can always be so nearly arranged, that, after the first sketch is obtained, they may be carried on with confidence. It is the accidental forms that are so valuable to be adopted as they arise. In Plate XIV. is shown the method of obtaining the first sketch from nature. In this it will be seen that the general character is obtained without reference to the detail. The angularity of the lines also is marked, with their different bearings, perpendicularly, horizontally, and obliquely; and which are always well to be left in until you have established the accuracy of your drawing. In the next plate is shown the outline finished, and a reference to the two will prove how easily the detail is engrafted upon a sketch made with due attention to first principles.

PLATE XV.

In the Frontispiece and Plates XV. and XVI., the proportions of the figure observable at the different periods of life will be found. It has been before mentioned that in childhood the head is larger, as compared with that of the adult, and the different members of the body are shorter and thicker, as compared in their length, than is found to be the case in the matured figure.

PLATE XIV.

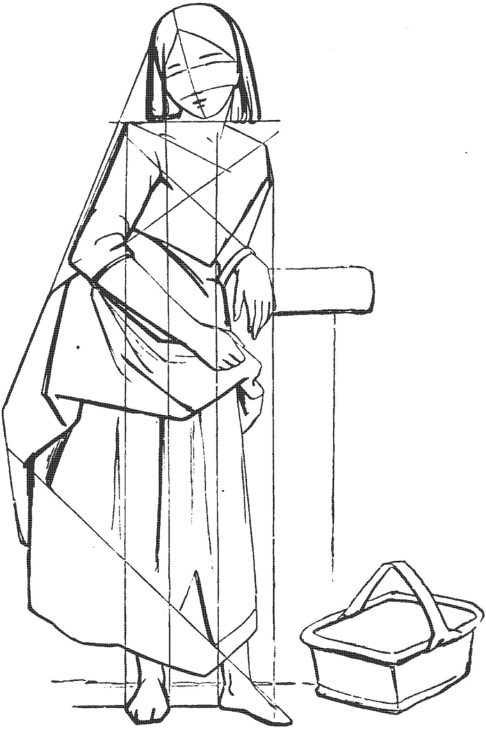
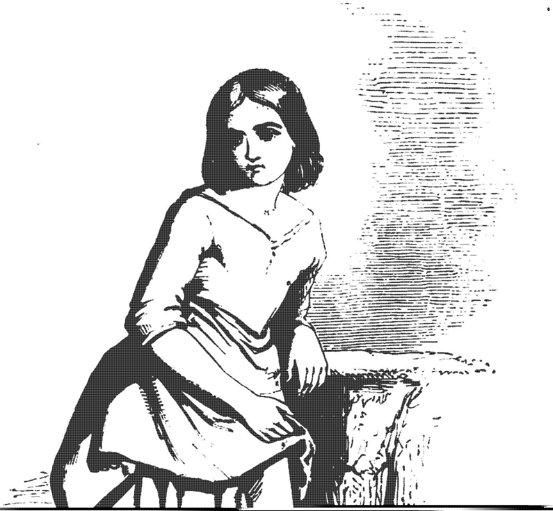


PLATE XV.



is given: and indeed, in many instances, we find the landscape and figure painters combining their talents in the same work with the most successful result.

The pupil, who commences with landscape drawing, may, if care be not taken in the commencement, acquire a looseness of hand that will be prejudicial to him in figure drawing. The suddenly terminated and accented line which the landscape draughtsman is in the habit of using, though commonly resorted to by the figure draughtsman in sketching his first ideas of general form in groups, and even in single figures, must be adopted with the utmost circumspection by the student; and it must be borne in mind that the peculiar charm in such lines results from the perfect mastery exhibited in their groupings and proportions. This mastery is brought about by long practice; and even these peculiar appearances of facility are so many proofs that the master hand, which accomplished them, had been early tutored in the more severe, but at the same time simpler, manner of line.

The master, in using the pencil in this manner, may be said to paint with it. The best line for the pupil to adopt, is the pure simple line of equal pressure throughout; such we find in the beautiful outlines of Flaxman, such we find in the still more beautiful delineations on the antique vases, those models upon which he formed his taste.

In the character of finished outline subjects, such as we now find in many published works, there is a departure from the method adopted by the Greeks; the difference between them is that the modern school use a line of twofold quality where a thicker and a thinner portion are intended to represent the shaded and lighted side of the object; and this may stand as its apology.

CONCLUSION.

Having now gone through the proportions of the figure, and directed the student's attention to the method considered advisable to be pursued in the continuation of this study, little remains to be added. The theory of drawing is comprised in a very small compass. To make the accomplished draughtsman, practice and experience are required; all the teacher can do is, to direct the practice; and the best result is obtained when the pupil is taught to think for himself, and form by experience his own conclusions.

Drawing, like writing, is an imitative art; letters are first formed, then combined into words, and those words form the means of explaining our requirements and communicating our ideas.

In drawing, we produce the resemblance of objects; the combination of these objects represents circumstances, and realises to the mind the pictures formed thereon by the poet or historian.

All rules are formed from practice; and while some are content to bound their knowledge by received rules, others, with more praiseworthy courage, think for themselves, and form theories upon their own practice, or that of others.

A pupil should never rest satisfied with copying from the works of others, however beautiful they may be, any more than a person, who has been taught to read or write, should be content in always using the words or sentences that have formed the examples on which he has been instructed.

It is to be supposed that the best models in both cases have been placed before him, in order to the formation of his taste; and, as in language we can only use words that are to be found in its Dictionary, so in drawing we can only copy some object that has had a previous existence; it is the arranging, comparing and combining, in both cases, upon which we found our claims to originality, and by which we form our estimate of past ages, and by which too we ourselves shall be judged in ages to come.

END.

LONDON:
Printed by Schulze and Co., 13, Poland Street.